ČEDOMIR ANTIĆ

The History of Serbia

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To Lada, Vid and Ivana

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ALPHABETI SERBORUM

cum

viciniorum popularium et aliis cultiorís Europae alphabetis παραλληλισμὸς.

Serb. graec.	Serb. lat.	Hungar.	Croat.	Carniol.	Bohem	Polon.	German.	Ital.	Gall.	Angl.
А а *а*	a	á	a	a	𝔞	a	𝔞	a	a	—
Б б *б*	b	b	b	b	𝔟	b	𝔟	b	b	b
В в *в*	v	v	v	v	𝔴	w	𝔴	v	v	v
Г г *г*	g	g	g	g	𝔤'	g	𝔤	g: gara	g: gant	g: gold
Д д *д*	d	d	d	d	𝔡	d	𝔡	d	d	d
Ђ ђ *ђ*	dj, gj	gy	dy, gy	—	𝔡'	—	—	—	—	—
Е е *е*	e	e	e	e	𝔢	e	𝔢	e	e	e: bet
Ж ж *ж*	x	zs	s	sh	𝔷̌	z'	—	—	j	s: osier
З з *з*	z	z	z	s	𝔷	z	ſ: 𝔩𝔢ſ𝔢𝔫	s: rosa	z	z:razor
И и *и*	i	i	i	i	𝔦	i	𝔦	i	i	ee, y
Ј ј *ј*	j	j	j	j	𝔧	i: ia	𝔧	j	i: mien	y: yes
К к *к*	k	k	k	k	𝔨	k	𝔨	c: caro	c: car	k
Л л *л*	l	l	l	l	𝔩	l?: wilk	𝔩	l	l	l
Љ љ *љ*	lj	ly	ly	lj	—	l: li	—	gl: gli	il. ail	—
М м *м*	m	m	m	m	𝔪	m	𝔪	m	m	m
Н н *н*	n	n	n	n	𝔫	n	𝔫	n	n	n
Њ њ *њ*	nj	ny	ny	nj	𝔫̌	ń	—	gn	gn	—
О о *о*	o	o	o	o	𝔬	o	𝔬	o	o	o: note
П п *п*	p	p	p	p	𝔭	p	𝔭	p	p	p
Р р *р*	r	r	r	r	𝔯	r	𝔯	r	r	r
С с *с*	s	sz	sz	ſ	ſ, 𝔰̄	s	ß	s: sono	s: son	s: so
Т т *т*	t	t	t	t	𝔱	t	𝔱	t	t	t
Ћ ћ *ћ*	ch	ty	—	—	𝔱'	—	—	—	—	—
У у *у*	u	u	u	u	𝔲	u	𝔲	u	ou	oo
Ф ф *ф*	f	f	f	f	𝔣	f	𝔣	f	f	f
Х х *х*	h?	h	h	h	𝔠𝔥	ch	𝔠𝔥	—	—	—
Ц ц *ц*	c	cz	cz	z	𝔠	c	𝔷	z: zio	—	—
Ч ч *ч*	cs	cs	ch	zh	𝔠̌	cs	𝔱ſ𝔠𝔥 (?)	c: ciò	—	ch: child
Џ џ *џ*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	ge	—	j
Ш ш *ш*	sc, sh	s	ss, sh	ſh	ſſ, 𝔰̈	sz	ſ𝔠𝔥	sc: esce	ch: cher	sh
Ъ ъ *ъ**)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

*) Nil sonat (nisi forte vocalem mutam), sed r literae, quae Serbis, sicut Bohemis, vel sola absque ulla vocali, syllabam facit, apponitur, ne eadem r litera ad praecedentem aut sequentem syllabam trahatur, e. g. умръо, гръоце, lege u-mr-o, gr-o-ce.

OVERVIEW

Serbia is one of the oldest states in Europe. The Republic of Serbia covers a total of 88,361 km^2 (including the breakaway Province of Kosovo and Metohija). This putsit at the 113th place out of a total of 249 countries in the world. As of the 2011 census, the Republic of Serbia (excluding the province of Kosovo and Metohija) has a total population of 7,186,862, putting it at the 100th place of 242 countries and territories in the world. Serbian purchasing power parity GDP in 2012was officially estimated by the World Bank at $37.7 billion, placing it at the 90th place out of 194 countries.

The Republic of Serbia in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula. Its borders encompass the southern expanses of the Pannonian Plain and the Danube and Sava rivers separate the southern and central parts of the country. The central part of the country is comprised of the fertile regions of Šumadija and Pomoravlje, while the fertile and mountainous region of Kosovo and Metohija lies in the southwest. The Šar Mountains form a mountain range that separates Serbia from Macedonia, while the Prokletije mountain range marks the natural border with Albania. Estimates suggest that in the early 2010s the Serbian people numbered around 10.5 million in the world. As of 2011 census, there are 5,988,150 citizens of the Republic of Serbia who identify as Serbs. The

Serbs also make up a significant part of the population in two independent European countries without a clear ethnic majority – Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. Around 1.9 million Serbs live in neighbouring countries. There is another million Serbs living in the USA and EU.

After its formation in the 8th century, Serbia experienced its golden age as a kingdom and empire in the 14th century and a despotate in the 15th century. Following long conflicts with the Ottoman Turks, it was finally conquered by the Ottoman Empire in 1459. After it was restored in the early 19th century following a national revolution, it was re-established as an autonomous principality under the patronage of Russia and the Ottoman Empire. In 1856 it was placed under the protection of six European powers. Serbia's formal independence was recognized in 1878, at the time when this status was enjoyed by less than a fifth of present-day states. Serbia became a kingdom four years later. After the liberation of Kosovo, Metohija, the region of Novi Pazar and Vardar Macedonia in 1912 and the annexation of Banat, Bačka, Baranja and the Kingdom of Montenegro, Serbia – together with the unrecognized state of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs – formed the first Yugoslav state: The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In 1929 it was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. After the civil war and the communist revolution in the aftermath of WWII, this state experienced many transformations, being renamed the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia (DF Yugoslavia), Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia and finally Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Over the following decades the country experienced a process of gradual confederalization and ultimately dissolution in the last decade of the 20th

century. Throughout this period, Serbia was a federal unit and was federalized even further after the establishment of Kosovo and Vojvodina as autonomous provinces. In the late 1980s managed to regain its control over the provinces and after the breakup of SFRY it remained in a federation with Montenegro then called the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (formed on 27th April 1992). After 11 years of conflicts, sanctions, crises, internal clashes and the NATO airstrike campaign, FR Yugoslavia was abolished in February 2003 and renamed the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. Three years later, following a narrow majority vote of the citizens of Montenegro in favour of independence, the Republic of Serbia once again became an independent state after 88 years. In February 2008 temporary institutions under the patronage of the UN and NATO in Kosovo and Metohija proclaimed the independence of the Republic of Kosovo with an Albanian ethnic majority, which is yet to be recognized by Serbia and the UN.

The origin of the nouns 'Serb' and 'Serbia' is an interesting question. According to the interpretation of the learned Byzantine emperor and scholar Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, upon their migration to the Balkans the Serbian and Croatian tribes acknowledged Byzantine suzerainty and the Serbs were named 'Servii' to indicate their subjugated position. Hence many European nations, including the British, referred to Serbia as Servia and the Serbs as Servians until 1914. The meaning behind their respective names is impossible to establish in both the Serbian and the Croatian case. One of the theories suggests that the demonym Serbs comes from a noun found in East Slavonic languages which denotes a smaller separate tribe. The first undisputed

reference to the nouns Serb and Serbia was discovered by George Ostrogorsky in the name of a city founded after the resettlement of a large number Slavs in Asia Minor during the reign of Constans II (641–668). The name of this city was Gordoservon.

Although many historians agree with the notable scholar of Balkan history Trajan Stojanović that on the eve of the First Serbian Uprising (1804–1813) the Serbian society was closer to the Neolithic age than the medieval paradigm, the first Serbian state – known in the sources as Serbia and Serbian Land – was established soon after the settlement of the Serbs in the Balkans in the third and fourth decade of the 7th century. Porphyrogennetos reports that the early Serbian state comprised Rascia (the region of present-day Novi Pazar, Lim, north Montenegro, north Kosovo, western Serbia to the South Morava river), Bosnia (the territory in the upper parts of the Bosna River valley), Pagania (the region of present-day Makarska), Zachlumia (eastern Herzegovina and the immediate vicinity of Dubrovnik to the Ston Cape), Travunia (the region of Boka Kotorska and its hinterlands) and Duklja (the hinterlands of Bar and the vicinity of the Skadar Lake). This country – oriented towards the Adriatic Sea and constantly under threat from its powerful neighbours Bulgaria and Hungary – moved its epicenter over time. At the time of Duklja's domination, its ruler Mihailo Vojislavljević received his royal crown from Pope Gregory VII in 1077. After the decline of Duklja (later known as Zeta), in the 12th century the Serbian medieval state emerged in Rascia. Ruled by the Nemanjić dynasty (1166–1371), it gradually retreated from Bosnia and the northwestern regions and turned to the North, South and

East. It was during the reign of the first Nemanjić rulers that the city of Niš became a part of the Serbian state. Under King Milutin the Serbian kingdom reached the Danube, conquered Skoplje and temporarily held Belgrade. After Stefan Uroš IV Dušan – the most powerful representative of the House of Nemanjić – was crowned emperor in 1346, Serbia gained access to three seas and reached the island of Euboea, the Gulf of Corinth and Chalkidiki. The period of decline and the ensuing feudal anarchy after the emperor's death coincided with the Ottomans' arrival on European soil. The process of the dissolution of the Serbian medieval state lasted over 180 years: from the Battle of Stephaniana to the Battle of Gorjani, from the defeat of Dušan's duke Preljub to the death of the last Serbian despot Pavle Bakić. Although heavily defeated in the Battle of the Maritsa River in 1371, after which most Balkan states became Ottoman vassals, and although badly shaken in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, Serbia persevered until the fall of Smederevo in 1459. On the territory of Srem which was a part of the Hungarian state, Serbian despots remained in power until 1537.

For two and a half centuries, the Serbian people lived without its crushed nobility relying on the remnants of its church; the church was restored in 1557, but from the mid-18th century its leading clergy was recruited from the ranks of the Greek-dominated Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. In spite of all this, the idea of unity was kept alive by the Patriarchate of Peć, whose sphere of jurisdiction outgrew the historical borders of Serbia, and the powerful idealized memory of the medieval past that lived on in the unconquered lands of present-day Montenegro, western Bosnia, north Dalmatia and Lika. In the late 16th century

Serbian deputations made offers of the Serbian crown to some neighbouring rulers. The Great Migration of the Serbs in the late 17th century brought a degree of autonomy to the Serbian people in south Hungary shortly before the restoration of the Serbian state. From 1718 to 1739 the Austrian authorities established the so-called Kingdom of Serbia on the territory of the Sandžak[1] of Smederevo (Pashalik of Belgrade). After the Treaty of Sistova in 1791, the Serbs in the Sanjak of Smederevo, most of who had settled in this territory during the 18th century, were granted some privileges. The abrogation of these privileges was one of the causes of the Serbian revolution of 1804.

1 Sanžak was an Ottoman administrative unit.

1.

PREHISTORY

The first humans settled on the territory of present-day Serbia some 40 thousand years ago, during the last ice age. Small groups of nomads first settled in West and Central Europe and later in the Balkan Peninsula. The first settlers probably arrived from the North and East. The region of present-day Serbia was covered in dense pine and birch woods, as well as grassland plains. The climate was arctic. Small Paleolithic human communities – no larger than a few families each – lived in mountain caves, including the cave at the foot of Jerinino brdo, the cave of Zlot in east Serbia and the Risovača Cave in central Serbia. The settlers were relatively few and lived in groups as hunters and gatherers during the time when large forests were still inhabited by prehistoric animals (large herbivores such as giant deer and wild horses). These ancient tribes used crude stone pebbles and animal bones as tools. A human tooth discovered in the cave at the foot of Jerinino Brdo shows that these humans were anthropologically no different than modern people. The caves were deserted around 25,000 years BC following the last wave of the ice age.

From 20,000 to 12,000 years BC, organized groups of hunters arrived following large packs of animals which quickly traversed the woodland expanses from the Volga River to the Balkans. A new climate change in Europe began at the beginning of the 12^{th} millennium BC. The glacial period ended, ushering in the interglacial period that is still ongoing today. A new culture spread over the continent. The Balkan hinterlands were influenced by the Mediterranean cultures which around 10,000 BC spread over the Sava and Danube to the North.

Due to temperature changes and difficult living conditions, these small communities found themselves in crisis. Ancient humans found refuge in the largest gorge in Europe – the Iron Gates (Serbian: Đerdap gorge/Đerdapska klisura). It was there that the culture of Lepenski Vir flourished from 6,700 to 5,500 BC. This was the first time that human settlements were created under the open sky in these regions. The cascading plateaus above the river became a "huge refuge for all living things", to quote the prominent Serbian archaeologist Dragoslav Srejović. The settlements in Lepenski Vir gradually merged with each other. Although they occasionally changed their place of habitation due to exhaustion of natural resources, the members of this culture built identically shaped permanent homes in limestone and even had their own religion. They were the first to domesticate animals. They treated their elders with special reverence, as indicated by the evidence which suggests that older men and women were buried differently than younger people. This culture is believed to have had a clear-cut hierarchy which particularly favoured the old with unusual experiences and rare skills. At the time of the Lepenski Vir culture,

its members began cultivating crops. The domesticated dog and cultivated crops initially had ritual and cult status. In some settlements they even made tools and weapons; in others, they built temples and made sculptures that represented human and fishlike beings.

By the mid-6th millennium BC, groups of newcomers from the neighbouring areas took over the heritage of Lepenski Vir. As these new settlers were engaged in farming and animal husbandry, crops and cattle were put to practical use. This culture was also Neolithic and had more settlements and residents than any of those that preceded it. Its early period is known as the Starčevo culture and as the Vinča culture in its later stages of development. Both encompassed almost the entire territory of present-day Serbia, with their populations inhabiting areas all the way to the northern reaches of modern Greece. This was a farming culture with a polytheistic religion. The humanlike figures reappeared. The crisis of the Starčevo culture caused by a new wave of settlement from Asia Minor to the southern regions of the Balkans and the withdrawal of the local population to the North led to the emergence of the Vinča culture. Concentrated in central Serbia, by the banks of the Morava, Sava, Danube and Mureș rivers, the Vinča culture flourished between 4400 and 3800 BC. It had three regional variants: the Kosovo, South Moravian and Danubian version. Similarities in their art, building techniques and cults suggest that this was the same culture with a few variants. At this time the population began to domesticate large cattle and discovered mining, exploiting cinnabar at the Avala Mountain near Belgrade and copper near Majdanpek.

The Vinča culturere presents one of the greatest civilization peaks of Neolithic Europe. By the end of this period some of the houses built in the Danube valley were very large. This culture lived peacefully throughout the millennium, trading with its neighbors and having no fortifications around its settlements. Migrations from the East (present-day Bulgaria and the southeastern parts of modern Romania) led to the crisis of the Vinča culture. This new population occupied roads and brought a new, cruder culture. The centress of the Vinča culture both in the South and the North were burnt down in their conflicts. Reduced to the territory of modern Šumadija, this great Neolithic culture gradually declined and fell into oblivion.

The Bronze Age ensued. The new settlers would soon encounter the emerging Mediterranean civilizations and take the momentous step into history.

2.

THE LAND OF CELTS AND TRIBALLI

It was the migrations at the turn of the 1st millennium BC that led to the gradual emergence of tribes from the north of the Balkan Peninsula who would enter the stage of the Ancient World. The territory of present-day Serbia was inhabited by Thracians, Triballi, Illyrians and Dardanians. Even though all of these tribes appear in the writings of Greek and Roman historians, little is known about their origin and history. These tribes were formed on the foundations laid by the cultures of the Bronze Age. The strength of the impact of migrations at this time remains unknown.

Illyrians inhabited the areas along the Adriatic coastline and some territories in the interior of the peninsula, but were concentrated in modern Albania, parts of Serbia, northern Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina and parts of Croatia. This was not a single people, but a group of tribes probably named by the Greeks after one tribe – the one that was geographically the closest to them. The first Illyrian king that we know of was called Bardylis and ruled in the late 5th and early 4th century BC, waging a triumphant war against Epirus and

Macedonia. He was killed in one of the battles against the Greeks. The Illyrians were also known to have been pirates whose stronghold was located in the valley of the Neretva River. The Romans gained access to the Balkans after they defeated the Illyrian and Greek rulers on the Adriatic Sea in three wars (late 3rd – early 2nd century BC).

The first record of the Thracians is found in the *Iliad*. They are believed to have developed from a mixture of the indigenous Neolithic population and the settlers who arrived in the first waves of Indo-European migrations. They inhabited the territories of present-day Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Hungary and Turkey. The oldest Thracian state was the Odrysian kingdom (5th century BC). The leader of the famous servile uprising in Ancient Rome was Spartacus, a Thracian gladiator.

The Dardanians emerged in southern regions of modern Serbia (Kosovo and Metohija) and some parts of Macedonia as the result of ethnic mixing between the Thracians and Illyrians. They entered historical record as the enemies of the Greeks and Macedonians. After some success under the leadership of Bardylis, the Dardanian-Macedonian conflicts continued for generations. Later on, they supported the Roman advance in the Balkans even after they were betrayed by their new allies and patrons on several occasions. Under Augustus, Dardania was incorporated into the Roman state.

In 6 AD Illyrian tribes led by Bato rebelled against Rome in one of the greatest revolts in Roman history. The rebels included the Illyrian tribes on the territory of present-day western Serbia, north Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. It took ten Roman legions – approximately 60,000 troops – to quash the rebellion.

Central Balkans and the valley of the Iskar River (present-day Bulgaria) were inhabited by the Thracian tribe of the Triballi. The first record of the tribe dates from the 5th century BC and their conflicts with neighbouring Thracian and Illyrian tribes. They defeated Philip II of Macedon when he attempted to cross over the Haemus Mountains[2] on his return from a campaign against the Scythians, but the King of Macedon managed to triumph against them later on. During his campaigns on the Danube, Alexander the Great defeated the Triballi on three occasions. The Triballi also suffered heavy losses during the Celtic campaign against Greece in 280 BC. They finally fell to the Romans after bitterly resisting their invasion for over fifty years.

In the early 3rd century BC an enormous Celtic invasion flooded the Balkans. These tribes had spread over the territory from northern France and Britain to the Danube River. In the previous century these fearless Gauls had conquered Rome and burnt it down. Estimates suggest that the enormous army that set out against Macedonia and Hellenic states numbered about 85,000 troops. The advance of this army was unstoppable. Macedonia fell, and its ruler was captured and executed. The Hellenic troops were defeated in the Battle of Thermopylae (279 BC). The Delphi sanctuary was conquered and sacked, with its invaluable riches plundered; two hundred years later, these treasures were recovered by Roman legions in Gaul. But the Celtic invasion did not end with their conquests. A part of the tribe returned to the North and another part crossed into Asia

[2] The Balkan mountain range

Minor, establishing the historical region of Galatia in the highlands of central Anatolia.

On their return, a tribe named the Scordisci – perhaps the result of ethnic mixing between the Celts and the indigenous population – consolidated their power in the valleys of the Sava and Danube, erecting a stronghold on the confluence of these two rivers. Settlements on the site of present day Belgrade endured for thousands of years; however, the name of the Scordisci stronghold persevered for eight centuries. The meaning of the first part of the compound non Singidunum remains unknown, although it is possible that it signified the circular shape of the tower/stronghold or the name of the Thracian tribe they encountered after their arrival. The second part of the compound is believed to have meant ”city” or ”stronghold.”

Recently the history of these tribes has become more important than was the case in the previous four centuries. In the last few decades, Europe has seen the establishment of about twenty new independent states. Many of these states had no independent tradition of state-building to rely on or had relatively small and irrelevant national movements in the 19th century. The principle of territorial integrity introduced after WWII imbued these new states with a sense of importance and encouraged their elites to find underpinnings for new interpretations of their past. What these new states needed was a new, different national ideology. The modern advances in genetics provided some kind of a new basis for this new brand of nationalism. This genetic research was interpreted to indicate that the genetic heritage of the ancient population of Europe went deeper and meant more than any of the migrations that followed after the Fall

of Rome and that, hence, the descendants of these ancient indigenous tribes dominate most European countries. Thus, every new state – whatever its borders – could claim that its population was special and that its nationality and historical heritage were imposed on it in the following centuries.

The claim that the Albanians are descended from the Illyrians was first suggested in the 18th century. In the Albanian national context, the ancient Illyrians were viewed as a single contemporaneous tribe with the aim of highlighting their own tradition and the position of the indigenous tribe in the Balkans. This claim, however, is based solely on linguistic arguments and is difficult to corroborate. Little is known today about the Illyrian language; what little evidence there is suggests that the Albanians are in fact descended from the Thracians. Another theory suggests that the Albanians' ancestors lived in the Balkan hinterlands and is based on the fact that modern Albanian words for sailing and fishing were adopted from other languages. This theory assumes that the ancestors of modern Albanians crossed Dardanian lands and settled on the territory of present-day Albania in Roman times. None of these theories about the origin of the Albanians have ever been accepted, nor have they managed to become the mainstream explanation in academic circles.

All of these arguments are largely based on their language. Historically there is no continuity in the history of the Albanian people beyond the 11th century and the short-lived principality of Arbanon located in present-day north Albania.

By contrast, the Serbian national identity was built on the Serbs' Slavic origin and its known history. However,

in the 19th and early 20th century claims were made – and won some popularity – about a supposed ”conspiracy of the Nordic-Germanic school of thought” which allegedly falsified the history of the Serbian people to hide the fact that they belonged to the indigenous population of the Balkans. Most of these theories are academically unfounded and in most cases their authors simply misinterpreted ancient or medieval sources, especially because Byzantine historians often referred to their contemporaneous peoples by the names of ancient tribes. For example, the Turks were called the Persians; Bulgarians – the Moesi and the Serbs – Triballi. This name remained in use until the 18th century and made its way into the first modern history books. The first coat of arms of modern Serbia created during the First Uprising represented Triballia.

Pioneering research of ethnic origin has shown that modern European nations generally represent a mix of various ancient tribes. Consequently, their contemporary identity was constructed historically. According to the findings of the Swiss genetics institute iGenea, the genetic makeup of the inhabitants of Germany is comprised of 45% Celtic, 25% Teutonic, 20% Slavic and 10% Jewish ancestry. The genetic background of the Turkish population is made up of nine peoples– Turks, Phoenicians, Berberi, Hellenes, Teutons, Slavs, Arabas, Illyrians and Jews. In the Balkans, the genetic heritage of the ancients is significant. In the case of the Croatian, Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Serbian population, the Illyrian origin makes up 34%, 40% and 21% respectively. The population of present-day Albania is about 30% of Illyrian origin. The inhabitants of modern Serbia allegedly have the largest genetic share of the Slavic population

– about 30%, with 21% Illyrian, 18% Teutonic, 14% Celtic, 9% Phoenician, 6% Hellenic and 2% Viking ancestry.

A study conducted on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina has shown that prehistoric migrations had a much stronger impact on the genetic structure of its ethnic groups than any of the migrations in later millennia.

Of course, all of these studies are more scientific than practical as modern national communities are based on the shared standardized national language.

3.

FIFTEEN ROMAN EMPERORS

Roman legions tried to conquer the regions of present-day Serbia for almost 50 years. The conquest began with the campaign of the Roman proconsul in Macedonia, Gaius Scribonius Curio. In 75 BC this renowned Roman general and orator, the commander of Sula's army during the First Civil War, a friend of Cicero's and Caesar's opponent, became the first Roman commander to reach the Danube. This was an important campaign and for his success its leader was awarded a triumph in Rome. The conquest was completed when Marcus Licinius Crassus, the grandson of the famous member of the First Triumvirate, conquered these lands during the reign of Octavian Augustus, the first Roman emperor. The central and southern regions of modern Serbia and north Bulgaria were included into the new Roman province of Moesia in 6 AD. In the following decades, attacks from the Dacians from the North forced Emperor Domitian to lead his army to the rescue of the province. In 87 AD the province was divided and the western regions were now called Moesia Superior. In the following years a bitter war was fought from Moesia Superior to conquer Dacia, a state located on the territory of present-day Romania. Emperor

Trajan (98-117), who ruled the Roman Empire at its largest, led two wars against the Dacians. During one of these campaigns, on the territory of present-day Serbia, an architect named Apollodorus of Damascus built the first bridge over the Danube, the remnants of which are still extant. Dacia was finally conquered.

The territory of present-day Serbia included parts of the provinces of Dacia, Pannonia, and (later) Dardania. These parts of the Balkans were important for the Roman Empire both for defensive reasons (the limes system) and because many imperial legionaries had been recruited from the ranks of their inhabitants in the last centuries of the Empire. In these tumultuous times, when emperors were appointed by acclamation, the Empire was plagued by civil wars. In the 3rd century, changes on the Roman throne happened on average every 30 months. As many as 15 out of 20 so-called Illyrian emperors, who ruled the Empire from 250 to 565 AD, were born in the provinces whose territories now make up present-day Serbia[3], including the greatest among Late Roman emperors: Constantine the Great and Justinian the First. Unlike Constantine who was born in Naissus[4], who reunited the Roman Empire and laid the foundations for the triumph of Christianity and the new imperial capital of Constantinople, and Justinian (born near what is today the town of Leskovac, in southeast of Serbia), whose armies would reunite the Mediterranean under Roman rule one last time two centuries later, most of these barracks emperors wore the imperial purple for a very short while and had

[3] The Roman capital, with its million inhabitants, was the birthplace of 11 emperors.
[4] Present-day Niš

extremely short-lived careers. Having spent two years on the throne, Trajan Decius was killed in a battle against the Goths in 251, becoming the first Roman emperor – according to tradition – to retreat before and succumb to the barbarians. He would not be the last. Aurelian defeated large barbarian hordes on the Empire's borders, recaptured Palmyra and introduced the cult of the "Unconquered Sun" (Sol Invictus). This emperor ruled for no more than five years (270-275). Galerius, one of the members of Diocletian's new tetrarchy in the reformed Empire, defeated the Persians and, like Alexander the Great, even managed to capture the harem of the "king of kings". He launched a major persecution against the Christians, but two years before the Edict of Milan he was prepared to give up his struggle against them. His legacy includes the opulent residence of Felix Romuliana[5], the ruins of which are located in Gamzigrad near the town of Zaječar (in the east of Serbia). Another emperor born in Singidunum (present-day Belgrade) also had an interesting fate. Jovian was declared emperor after the death of the last champion of paganism, Julian the Apostate. He made a peace treaty with the Persians on humiliating terms and hurried to Constantinople. During his eight-month-long reign, he burnt down the Library of Antioch and made worship of the old gods punishable by death, but he never made it to the capital. He died of accidental mushroom poisoning or was poisoned by members of his own court. He is remembered as a great oenophile. Be that as it may, in the times of the conflict between Arianism and Orthodox Christianity, Jovian became the first great emperor who subscribed to the

[5] "Happy Romuliana", named in memory of his mother Romula

Nicene Creed. Christianity remained the dominant religion of the Empire throughout the next eleven centuries.

Ten Roman emperors were born in Sirmium[6], a large city which in the late 3rd century became one of the four imperial capitals. Estimates suggest that Sirmium had a population of almost 100,000 in the 4th century. Constantius II, one of the sons of Constantine the Great – the emperor who legalized Christianity – opted for Arianism, the teaching that rejects homoiousianism and asserts that the Father and Son are not ”one in being”. The bitter and unresolved clash between Arianism and Orthodoxy was the subject of four councils held in Sirmium under Constantius.

The fall of the Roman Empire could be said to have begun in the Balkans. The Battle of Adrianople (378), one of the first palpable effects of the great migrations, introduced a great shift. On the territory of present-day Serbia the Migration Period would last almost six hundred years.

[6] Present-day Sremska Mitrovica